

We've had a rush of new Spectrum and QL programs into the office this month, along with lots of club news. CGH Services is undoubtedly the most active QL publisher at the moment, with an expanding range of Public Domain and Shareware, as well as its own commercial range of cerebral games.

The latest arrivals include two games from the continent - *Dreamlands*, a large text adventure with dragons and wizards, written by Jean-Yves Rouffiac - and *Grey Wolf*, a U-Boat simulator from German Oliver Neef. *Grey Wolf* costs £9 on disk or £11 on two cartridges; *Dreamlands* is only available on disk, at £8.

Policeman Tony Woolcock's idiosyncratic adventure *The Blag* has been updated and reissued by CGH as *The Blag 2*. This game started life as an unpublished Spectrum title, designed while the author was waiting around Nottingham, policing the 1984 miners' strike. The QL rewrite was first sold by disappearing Thor dealer GAP Software.

Your objective is to solve a major crime by wandering around in the usual way, looking for clues and questioning witnesses, drunks and other police officers. You have a police car, dog and a realistic 'Police computer' which allows access to vehicle details, criminal records and gossip from the 'collator'. Evidence is collected in a computerised notebook, and hints are available from the author in the form of notes for the book.

All three of these titles require at least 256K of memory; *Grey Wolf* also needs a full screen monitor display.

We've just received a copy of *QL Playwright*, written by *Quanta* and *QL World* contributor Andrew Pritchard, and published by EJ Wilce. This is a specialist word processor, designed for the production of film, TV and theatre scripts. It comes with instructions on disk, along with advice about the conventional way that scripts are planned and laid out.

Formatting is automatic, apart from indentation, which is fast and easy to change. The program paginates your script to avoid 'orphans' and 'widows' - lone lines at the start or end of a page. Sections are automatically numbered and the author claims you can search, replace, cut and paste text very quickly, compared with 'general purpose' word processors.

QL Playwright costs £14.99 (£19.99 overseas) and is supplied on 3.5" disk for QLs with ex-

Sinclair Scene

Sid and Timothy survey the Sinclair situation and sift through a bundle of new programs

panded memory.

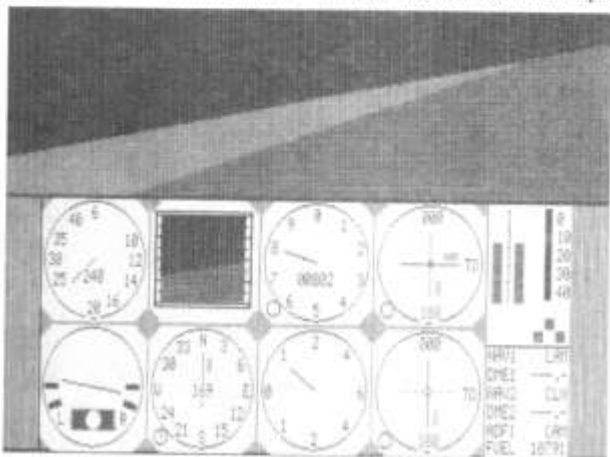
The QL has been waiting for a good flight simulator since 1984, when Psion started work on the QL follow-up to its Spectrum simulator. That project came to naught, but Deltasoft has belatedly stepped into the gap with *Flightdeck*, a simulation of a Boeing 737 passenger jet.

The simulation was developed over three years by a team of two pilots, an aero engineer, a geophysicist and an air traffic control-

normal instruments and controls, plus a useful set of three-letter acronyms: VOR/DME, ADF and ILS. They help you work out where you've got to, where you're going, and how to land safely.

Flightdeck costs £22.95 on disk or microdrive cartridge, and comes with a 21 page A5 manual.

Garner Designs has sent us three new Spectrum programs - *Desktop*, *Wimpy* and *Easy Load*, which were mentioned here last month. These turn out to be simple



Flightdeck - in flight display

ler. Presumably a programmer got in there somewhere as well, as most of the simulation is written in machine code, with a compiled Basic shell.

The plane flies around a simple 3D map of the UK, drawn with filled, shaded graphics. *Flightdeck* comes with a UK database of 200 navigational beacons and 25 major airports, plus sea, hills and a few cities. You can edit the map files or add more landmarks if you've got an expanded QL and don't mind the display slowing down. Engine and undercarriage noises are optional, and you can set the wind and cloud levels.

Once in flight, you have the

Plus Three Basic programs, supplied with documentation in the form of a few A4 sheets in dot matrix print.

Garner is setting up a Public Domain and Shareware library - a much-needed amenity in the Spectrum world. Plus Three shareware titles include two 'front end' disk management packages, as well as an Adventure-writing utility and an implementation of the 'Logo' programming language for any model of Spectrum. The snag is that these are 'cut down' versions, and you need to send a further £3 to Garner to get a fully-working version.

Garner Public Domain pro-

grams are available on disk or cassette. As often seems the case in the world of so-called 'free' Public Domain software, the pricing is horribly, needlessly complicated. Write for details.

Budget Spectrum utilities to reach us recently include *Plus D Hacker*, *Filer* and *Plus D Toolkit*, from *Format* magazine contributor SJ Nutting. These programs run on any Spectrum with an MGT disk interface, and come on 3.5" disk with between three and six pages of instructions. The programs are concise and cleverly written, but sometimes rather slow.

Filer is a random-access database which works with any MGT disk interface and a single 780K drive. The database stores 750 fixed-sized records, each arranged as a single screen - 42 columns of 22 lines, and you have the option to include colour changes and dividing lines.

Filer uses the whole disk surface, so you can't put anything else on the data disk. The access method does not seem to use any sector interleaving, so it takes about eight minutes to search a full 676K of data. It sounds a bit limited, but may be worth a look at just £3.10 on disk.

Plus D Hacker is a resident machine code monitor and hacking tool, like a combination of Romantic Robot's *Multiface* and *Genie*. *Hacker* costs £4.10 (£5.10 overseas) on disk, to suit any version of the Plus D.

Like MGT's own *Pick-POKE-It*, this package links into the Plus D's internal Ram and loads further code overlays from disk when you press the 'magic button'.

Plus D Hacker uses a 42 column display. It will disassemble machine code programs and find text, and even embedded graphics, in 48K or 128K memory. You can change memory or register contents - for instance, to enter *Multiface* POKEs - without disturbing the program in memory.

Plus D Toolkit is an extension to Spectrum Basic, formerly sold by the INDUG user group. The toolkit hides in otherwise-unused memory inside the Plus D interface. It provides a hotchpotch of useful disk management facilities, including a few reminiscent of *Betabytes' Disk Organiser*.

You call the toolkit up with the command `RUN *` followed by various single letters and perhaps other parameters. The code is permanently resident, and runs without disk access - it even survives reset, like GDos.

Toolkit commands test disks in a gruelling 35 minute ▶214

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211 procedure and will repair them in a further minute, as long as the directory in the first 20 sectors is undamaged. The 'repair' creates a new file which contains all the faulty sectors, so you can carry on using the rest of the disk. Hopefully.

Toolkit will recover deleted files, as long as you know the name and can pick the file-type from a list of eleven possibilities. It will also compress 48K or 128K Snapshot files to reduce the amount of disk space they take up. Compression can take up to five minutes, but the resultant file is claimed to be even more compact than a Multiface file in the 48K mode.

A snapshot of a small 128 Basic program might be squashed to 30K. The uncompressed part includes a lot of rubbish in Ram, mostly generated by the 128 Basic editor and Ram disk.

Other *Toolkit* tricks include a continuous clock display, with an interrupt-driven alarm. Tape files in standard blocks of up to 48K can be transferred to disk automatically, and there's a simple single-key file handling utility that can copy most types of file between two drives - but not 128K snapshots.

The final feature is automatic generation of BASIC DATA statements from code in memory. This does not seem to 'fit' with the others - it would seem more sensible to beef up the copier and allow for single-drive users.

Plus D Toolkit only works with the latest version 2 or 2a of the Plus D. It costs £3.60, or £4.60 for orders from outside the UK.

CLUB NEWS

The latest national Quanta Workshop was held outside Cambridge in August; hundreds of QL enthusiasts turned out for the weekend bash in the leafy surrounds of Papworth Hospital, just off the A45. The venue was Papworth Village Hall, which the organisers split into two parts, with refreshments, stalls and tables around the edge of the main hall and demos on the stage, including talks on Psion's *Archive* database and fractal graphics.

Rebel Electronics' hard disk made it to the Cambridge meeting, with a working interface and software, but the 'backplane' providing multiple expansion slots was the industry-standard "two to three weeks" from completion. The interface fits the slot at the end of the QL, so few people will be able to use it until they can plug it in at the same time as Ram and floppy disk expansion. We've been promised a

complete package for review, but we wouldn't like to say when it will eventually turn up!

The usual bizarre collection of machines were on display and at work, including heavily customised QLs and a couple of Atari STs running Tony Tebby's new device drivers for the ST QDOS emulator. Tebby himself was there, along with Miracle's hard disk system.

The star of the show was *Minerva* - a replacement QL Rom developed by Laurence Reeves of QView. *Minerva* is a £30 plug-in unit that fixes most of the bugs in Sinclair's "JS" Rom, adds new facilities and speeds up QDOS and the *SuperBasic* interpreter.

There are too many changes to list here, but compatibility seems good, apart from a new bug which stops turtle graphics working. The rest of the graphics have been re-written to run at 92 percent of the speed of DP's Lightning add-on! String handling and arithmetic are noticeably faster, and the system tests its memory more quickly after a reset.

Minerva SuperBasic supports integer and string SElect statements, as well as integer FOR loops (slightly faster than the floating-point equivalent) and string FOR loops (pretty bizarre). The commands are the same as on "JS" but WHEN variable and WHEN ERROR seem to work fine now, and ABS, ATAN, DATE, MODE, PAUSE, RESPR and VER\$ have been made more flexible.

You can use ESC to break out of AUTO and EDIT, and there are easy ways to enter an expanded set of foreign characters. Unfortunately, the old PAN and SCROLL bugs have been 'fixed', so you can't use those commands to control cursors or random access filing.

Minerva includes a facility to use the QL's 'second screen', allowing two displays to be swapped at will - but the second screen occupies memory that Sinclair used for the QL system variables, so many programs will not work properly if you enable the two-screen mode. *SuperTrace* won't run, as it needs a Sinclair Rom, but QView supplies an alternative TRACE utility.

QView must be careful to avoid infringing Amstrad/Sinclair copyright, so it requires purchasers to supply a dump of their QL Rom with their order. You can create such a dump easily enough, with SBYTES "FLP1 ROM", 0,49152. This 'proves' that you've paid Sinclair for QDOS - *Minerva* is then sold as a backup copy of

Sinclair's code, with 'improvements'.

QView returns your disk or cartridge with document files and the *Minerva* chip, which fits one of the Rom sockets inside your QL. It's up to you to remove the old Roms and fit the new one, but the instructions are clear and you should have no problems, unless you've got a PC-style keyboard with an interface that fills up the spare space inside the QL.

Minerva costs £30 from QView, 29 Carnaby Close, Godmanchester, Cambridgeshire PE18 8EE (0480) 412884. It's good value if you spend a lot of time using the QL, particularly if you write *SuperBasic* programs for your own use.

A little further North, the Birmingham sub-group of Quanta recently held its annual auction in a city pub. Members exchanged QL hardware and software at distress prices, with bargains like the *SuperToolkit 2* Rom knocked down to £7, and *Spellhound* at £4.50.

Twenty six boxed microdrive cartridges sold for £20, and many rare programs changed hands. At times, the atmosphere resembled an 'Antiques Roadshow', as members joked about software quirks and absurd 'copy protection' schemes.

Media Manager came under the hammer at £3, complete with orange loose-leaf manual; rather surprisingly, Talent's twin-tape game *Jungle Eddie* reached the same price, even though it will only run on 128K 'JM' machines. There's a tendency for the same novelties to make the rounds each year at this sort of club auction, but it was a good evening out nonetheless.

Other Quanta sub-groups meet regularly in Belfast, Birkenhead, Cambridge, Crewe, Essex, Leicester, Newcastle, Northampton, the Isle of Wight, Wantage and Warsash. New groups start (and stop) regularly. Software librarians and overseas subgroups are scattered over continental Europe and the USA.

The European scene is thriving, with recent QL shows in Belgium and Germany, and forthcoming events in Italy (September 23rd) and Belgium (October 21st). For further information, contact Quanta secretary Phil Borman on (0472) 49850.

Newsletter news

Quanta's eponymous newsletter runs to 40 typeset A5 pages, heretically produced on a PC clone. Recent issues have discussed unin-

terruptible power supplies, hard disks, PC and CP/M emulation - plus reviews, letters and inexhaustible topics like Psion software, printers, *SuperBasic* and lockups.

There's stacks of information in each issue of Quanta, and the group seems more active than ever, after more than five years filling in the gaps in the QL market.

The club library has been reorganised and now runs to 34 720K disks, with files organised according to program type - utilities, games, graphics, business and so on. There's a new charge of 50p per disk copied; you're expected to supply the media and return postage, or pay an extra 50p, plus a pound for each 3.5" disk, or 50p per 5.25" medium.

Format explores the serious side of the Spectrum, with recent articles on *Omnicalc*, GDOS and SAM - plus help, reviews, short programs, advice on hacking games, adventures, bug-fixes, machine code and the Forth programming language. The newsletter is now up to 36 well-presented pages a month, and publisher INDUG is about to celebrate its second birthday.

Z88 Eprom is a bi-monthly newsletter for Z88 users, in the standard A5 booklet format. The most recent issue includes product news, special offers, queries, hints and tips. There's a Basic programming tutorial; reviews cover 'Stop-watches', which converts your portable into 14 stopwatches, 'Topper', a Z88-cosy that stops keys pressing themselves in transit, and Ian Sinclair's inevitable *Z88 Computing* book.

The 44-page newsletter includes quite a lot of advertising from commercial publishers and readers. It lists the 73 programs in the club software library, and compares Astra and BSB satellites, as Z-88 maker Cambridge Computer has fingers in that pie at the moment.

Issue 2 of *Fractal Report* runs to 22 A4 pages, including lots of comments from early subscribers. One article covers 'affine transformations for graphics' - algorithms to make self-similar displays, like fractal ferns, spirals, trees and triangles. The example program is in simple Basic, which should run on any computer with pixel graphics.

As usual, the Mandelbrot Set gets tweaked, reflected and explored. Some prize-winning coordinates for investigation are listed, along with Basic programs and screendumps. A C listing explores the Julia Set - another infinite and fascinating world generated by simple maths. ▶ 216

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214 Articles discuss the speed and limitations of floating-point maths, with contributions from Spectrum, Beeb, PC, Arch, Mac and transputer users. The newsletter also lists sources of fractal programs and information. It's great stuff if you can program any sort of computer and are interested in the idea of 'order in chaos'.

Sean Sanderson's Spectrum Music Users Group has launched the first issue of its tape magazine, *Channel*, with text on one side and programs on the other. It's available to non-members at a 'trial' price of £1.50, and well worth a look if your Spectrum has musical pretensions.

Issue 2 is in the works and will feature a program to save Ram Music Machine sounds to disk, plus Midi synchronisation software and a Midi 'dump' routine for Casio's cheap but capable CZ synthesisers.

Issue 7 of *QL Adventurer's Forum* has been delayed due to photocopier problems, but should be out by the time you read this. A compilation disk of seven Public Domain QL adventures is available, with most available separately on microdrive cartridge. A

further 50 Public Domain PC adventures are up for grabs, but QLAF can't guarantee that they will run on any specific PC emulator. The copying charge is £1.10 for cartridges or £5.50 for disk compilations; you supply the media.

News from Italy

The latest club to join our list is QITALY, an 'umbrella' organisation intended to link QL users and clubs in Italy. Organiser Eros Forenzi has been reading *Shopper* since last year, and reports that there are around 20,000 QLs in Italy, mainly running the Italian version of Psion's package on 128K machines with "MGI" Roms.

QITALY was founded at the beginning of this year, and has already produced five issues of a disk magazine, containing Italian document files and dozens of compressed QL screenshots. Each issue costs 6,000 Italian lira (about £2.50 before currency charges), delivered anywhere in the EEC. Write first to check postal and customs charges if you live outside the EEC.

Issue 5 contains about 700K of data, with articles on simulating

the QL Rom with two 32K static Ram chips, part 5 of a disappointing machine code programming course which just listed 68008 mnemonics and their effects. A serialised translation of QJump's *Toolkit 2* manual seems unlikely to make QITALY many friends in the UK software industry.

The displays are rather slow to load, typically taking 15-30 seconds each to appear. They include screens from Gigasoft's *Pengi* game, a list of continental bulletin boards from *QTERM*, and screens from *Text 87*, without much in the way of commentary. There were reviews of Talent's old *Strip Poker* game and Digital Precision's *Desktop Publisher 2*, along with some late, but interesting, gossip and news about the QL scene.

The 3.5" disk included news of the imminent First Italian QL Users' Meeting, set in a plush northern villa. The screenshots included some very impressive digitised pictures of the venue, which looks a far cry from the pubs and village halls beloved of UK QL groups.

The meeting starts at 9am on Saturday 23rd September, and an impressive programme is planned.

For further information, call Quanta's Phil Borman in the UK on (0472) 49850, or ring Eros Forenzi in Italy at (0342) 492323.

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Sid Martin and Timothy Green are to Sinclair what David Bellamy is to cweepy cawlies
